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AUTHOR Davis, Joseph L.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the organization and operation of selected exemplary vocational counseling programs in diverse Ohio school districts and to identify conditions that appear to contribute to the effectiveness of vocational counseling services. The study also reported on problems and their preferred solutions, the observations of the investigator, and the recommendations adopted by the Ohio Advisory Council for Vocational Education. Six districts were selected from 15 nominated by a jury of five authorities; the districts were geographically dispersed and demographically varied. Administrators in these districts were interviewed, with the following results: (1) enrollment in vocational education has remained steady during the past five years; (2) educators reported little change in vocational course content and board of education policies; (3) the districts had a commitment to improving vocational counseling services as well as the content of vocational education programs; (4) the districts were heavily involved in helping students make informed educational decisions and were penetrating the lower grade levels with vocational education information; and (5) the entire faculty in each of the six school districts is expected to provide counseling services. (Following a summary of some of the exemplary practices in the districts, recommendations for state and local school boards and administrators are given.) (KC)

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Vocational Counseling In Ohio Schools

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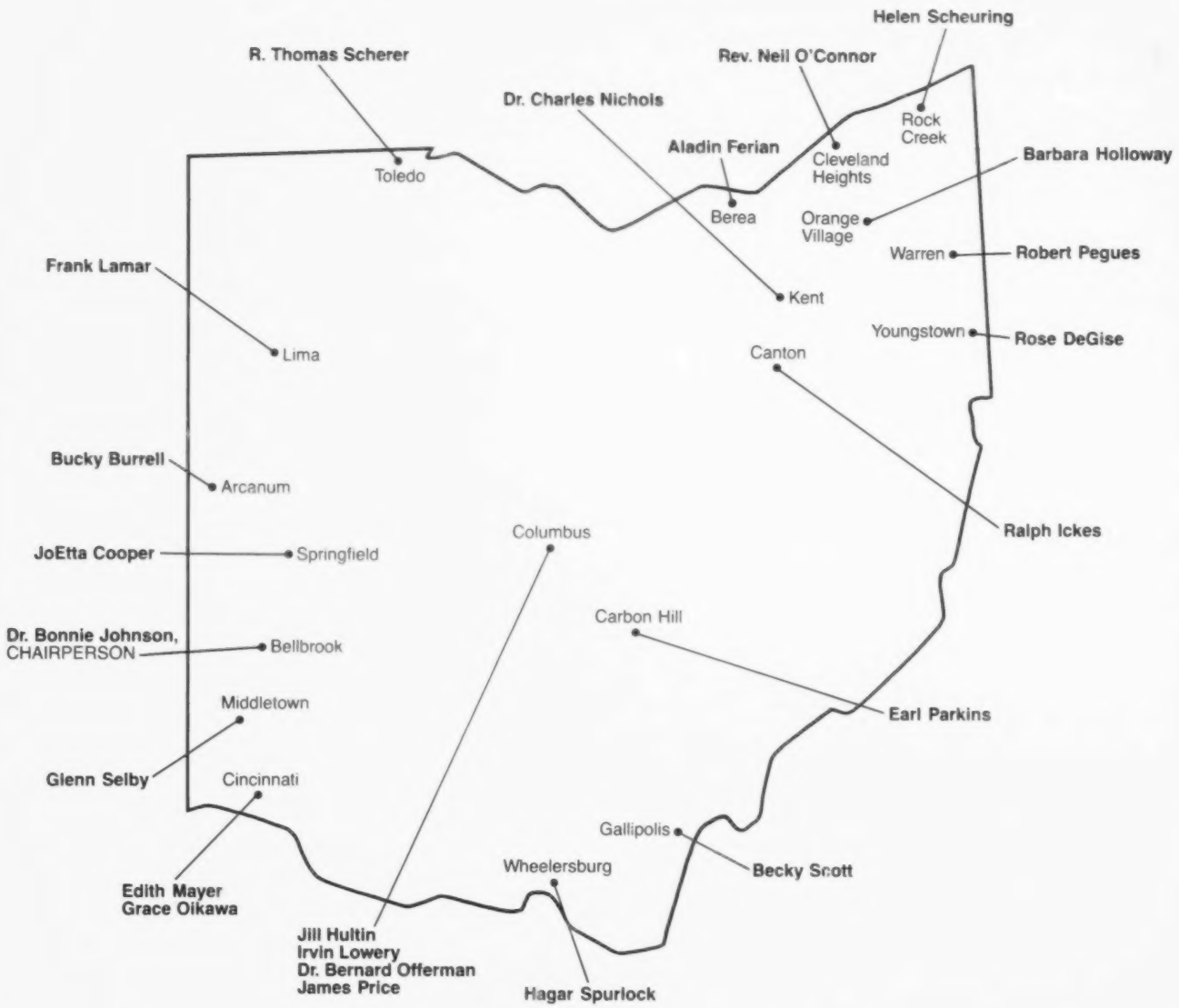

ADVISORY COUNCIL STAFF

Dr. Martin W. Essex, Exec. Dir.
Dr. Ralph E. Bender, Research Cons.
Mrs. Chloe Worley, Admin. Ass't

Foreword

The movement from an agrarian and small shop economy to a more complex structure has heightened two urgencies for effective counseling.

Present day youth rarely are knowledgeable about the workplace of their parents, nor do they see many of the workplaces of employed persons. Security measures have isolated the worker from a visible position to one which may require a permit to gain admittance. Previously, children worked alongside their parents and saw others at work as they moved about.

A second complexity is the tremendous growth to 20,000 different jobs. Many of these are white collar occupations which would be difficult to comprehend even though the person at work attempted to explain the job description.

Another factor relates to the curriculum. During an earlier era, a course was offered on occupations. Career Education is growing, but its future is as yet undetermined. The complexity of making a choice of occupation tends to be delayed until after graduation from high school, or, frequently, until after some years of college.

These observations are applicable regardless of the place of residence, whether it be in the inner city ghetto, suburbia or rural America. The task of acquainting the workers of the future has come to the school.

Fortunately, the strands of the many facets of this study are woven into a fabric which gives abundant evidence of being helpful to advance the status and effectiveness of the counseling services.

The Council is grateful to Dr. Joseph L. Davis, Adjunct Professor at The Ohio State University and recent Superintendent of the Columbus Public Schools, who served as the researcher for the study.

Bonnie Johnson
Dr. Bonnie L. Johnson, Chairperson

Martin Essex
Dr. Martin Essex, Executive Director

Contents

FOREWORD	1
INTRODUCTION	3
NATURE OF THE STUDY	4
Purpose	4
Design	5
Interview Guide	6
Basic Characteristics of School Districts Selected	7
FINDINGS	8
Trends	8
Common Program Features	10
Unique Program Features	11
Program Evaluation and Development	14
Staffing: Organization and Characteristics	15
Supportive Structure	19
Recruitment and Job-Placement	22
Internal Communications	27
External Relations	28
Facilitants	30
Constraints	32
Problems	34
Preferred Solutions	37
OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	38
RECOMMENDATIONS	40
BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTES	41

Introduction

Dawn will break on the twenty-first century within sixteen years. Since most students entering the eleventh grade in the fall of 1984 will be only thirty-two years old in the year 2000, their most productive years will be spent in the new century.

Ohio is committed to preparing its youth for that new day. The state is busily engaged in strengthening and refining its system of public education from kindergarten through graduate school with an eye toward equipping its youth with the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes they will need in order to realize their own potential and contribute fully to the enrichment of social, economic, and political life.

Vocational education in Ohio is getting deserved attention. Several initiatives launched during the 1980s have specific implications for vocational education and vocational guidance counseling. For example: In 1980, the State Board of Education adopted thirteen priorities for this decade and labeled them "Blueprint for Excellence."[1] One of the priorities explicitly relates to vocational education, and most of the others have discernible implications for vocational programs.

In 1981, the Advisory Commission on Articulation Between Secondary Education and Ohio Colleges published a report recommending additional units of college-preparatory course work for high school students intending to enroll in Ohio's public institutions of higher learning.[2] The impact of this and other recommendations of the Commission is now being felt by vocational educators.

In 1982, the State Board of Education authorized the establishment of an Ohio Commission on Educational Excellence, six months before the tide of national reports on excellence began to flow.[3] The Commission moved and unveiled its report late in 1983. The forty-nine recommendations of the Commission are designed to have a pervasive influence on the future of public education in Ohio. Also in 1983, the Ohio General Assembly appropriated substantial increases in funding for elementary and secondary education, and the State Board of Education adopted an array of new minimum standards, including specific provisions for guidance.[4]

The winds of change indigenous to these initiatives have complicated the always-difficult problem students and parents face each time decisions must be made about educational programs and course selections. As a result, a higher premium attaches to the services of school counselors at all grade levels and in all types of public schools.

Other forces -- including an escalation of credits required for high school graduation, the decline in population of the 16-to-18 year age group, and the lag of Ohio's economic recovery behind that of the nation -- conspired with the initiatives cited previously to elevate the timeliness of this study.

Nature Of The Study

Purpose

The major purposes of this study are: (1) to examine the organization and operation of selected exemplary vocational counseling programs in diverse Ohio school districts, (2) to identify conditions that appear to contribute to the effectiveness of vocational counseling services, and (3) to compile a report that will provide vocational educators with descriptive information about such conditions.

The study also reports on problems identified by practicing vocational educators and their preferred solutions to such problems, portrays the observations and conclusions of the investigator, and delineates recommendations adopted by The Ohio Advisory Council for Vocational Education (OACVE).

Design

The procedure employed in this study involved the following steps, listed in sequential order:

1. The scope of the study was defined; the study would be limited to "exemplary" vocational counseling programs through the twelfth-grade level.

2. The term exemplary programs was defined in the dictionary sense; that is, programs that "deserve imitation." (It must be emphasized that "exemplary" programs may or may not be among "the best" programs in Ohio. It was not the intent of the study to identify "the best" vocational counseling programs in the state.)

3. A jury of five authorities was drawn from the State Department of Education and the staff of OACVE to select six school districts having exemplary vocational counseling programs.

4. Selection criteria were developed to guide the efforts of the jury. It was determined that the districts selected:

   --Must have exemplary vocational counseling programs.
   --Must be dispersed geographically throughout the state.
   --Must be representative of a variety of types of school districts.
   --Must be representative of a wide variety of demographic characteristics.
   --Must serve a student body representative of a wide variety of socio-economic characteristics.
   --Must be broadly representative of the Ohio economy.

5. A limited search of the literature was conducted.

6. A 63-item interview guide was developed by the investigator and critiqued by the staff of OACVE.

7. Five copies of the interview guide were mailed to the superintendent of each district selected for the study so that interview subjects could familiarize themselves with its content and begin to compile information before the visit of the investigator.

8. An on-site visit was made by the investigator to each of the selected school districts to conduct interviews, tour facilities, and observe, in particular, the suite of vocational counseling offices.

9. Interviews were recorded on cassette tapes. Several interview subjects taped their own responses to selected items in the interview guide. A 146-page typescript was prepared from the cassette tapes and placed on file with OACVE.

10. Student handbooks, curriculum guides, vocational education plans, PRIDE reports, promotional brochures, and a variety of public relations materials were examined.

11. Data assembled through the processes listed above were then analyzed in terms of the purposes of the study.

Interview Guide

The content of the interview guide emerged from a limited review of the literature and a series of conferences involving the investigator and the staff of OACVE. The 63 items in the final draft of the interview guide were designed to elicit information in response to the following general questions:

1. What are the basic characteristics of the six school districts selected for this study?
2. What trends may be identified in each school district's enrollment, board policies, and vocational counseling program?
3. What features of the vocational counseling program are common across these school districts?
4. What are the unique features of each school district's vocational counseling program?
5. What facilitates the effectiveness of each school district's vocational counseling program?
6. What constrains the vocational counseling efforts of these school districts?
7. What provision do these school districts make for program evaluation and development?
8. How is the vocational counseling staff organized in each of these school districts? What are the characteristics of the counselors?
9. How extensive and how adequate is the supportive structure that undergirds each school district's vocational counseling program?
10. What provision does each school district make for meeting the critical vocational counseling needs of students, with emphasis on recruitment and job-placement?
11. What provision does each school district make for internal communication about vocational counseling?
12. What provision does each school district make for external relations with employers, governmental agencies, youth-service organizations, and the like?
13. What kinds of problems frustrate vocational educators in these school districts?
14. What are their preferred solutions to the identified problems?

Basic Characteristics of School Districts Selected

The jury initially identified fifteen school districts as having exemplary vocational counseling programs. This should not be interpreted to mean that only fifteen of Ohio's 103 vocational education planning districts have such programs. The jury felt that the fifteen districts constituted an adequate pool from which to select six districts for this study and that little could be gained from identifying additional districts.

The criterion of geographic dispersion was met by selecting one district from each of the following regions: northeastern Ohio, north-central Ohio, central Ohio, west-central Ohio, southern Ohio, and southwestern Ohio.

Four of the districts selected are joint vocational school districts. One serves a rural area. Another serves suburban communities adjacent to one of the state's largest cities. The other two jointures serve a rural-urban mix of population. Collectively, the four jointures serve forty-eight participating (sometimes called "feeder" or "home") school districts.

The fifth district selected is a large central city, with its own vocational program. It has not entered into any contracts to provide vocational education for its suburbs. The sixth district selected is a suburb of one of the state's largest cities. It offers a limited number of vocational subjects and contracts with the adjacent central city for access to its broad vocational program.

Interviews with vocational educators and data supplied by them document the wide range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics associated with the school districts selected for this study. The range of conditions may be portrayed by citing comments of the superintendent of the predominantly rural jointure in southern Ohio and the director of career education in one of the suburban districts. The former spoke of the "terrible poverty" in his school district and said, "We head the state in unemployment." The latter said: "It is no secret that [ours] is a district that has a large number of affluent families. . . . And we have a high percentage of students who indicate a desire to go on to college. Between eighty and eighty-five percent of our students select this path."

Incidentally, the other suburban district, a jointure, serves a blue-collar population, according to the district's coordinator of guidance.

Findings

Trends

Vocational educators interviewed in this study obviously are fascinated by trends in their respective school districts. As a group, their orientation is toward the future, and they appear to be less interested in recalling developments during the past five years than in commenting on what they expect the next three years to bring.

Enrollment of vocational students in the six school districts included in this study has remained remarkably steady during the past five years despite the shrinking population of youth in the 16-to-18 age group. For example, the coordinator of guidance for the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio reported that enrollment had ranged from 952 to 1,012 during this period, with 976 being enrolled during the 1983-84 school year. "This was irrespective of the roughly ten to thirty percent decline in available students at the home schools," he observed. He cited a number of unique and creative guidance programs as a contributing factor to the lack of enrollment decline in the vocational school during this period. Other interview subjects offered similar testimony.

Vocational educators interviewed reported relatively little change in board of education policies, the content of the vocational program, and counseling procedures during the past five years. They spoke of this as a period of "administrative redirection" and refinement of program offerings and counseling services. However, a significant board policy adoption was reported by the superintendent of the jointure in southern Ohio. He said that during the 1983-84 school year, the board recognized the need to upgrade the teaching staff and instituted a policy whereby the superintendent now has discretion to send fifteen members of the faculty to business firms, industries, and college workshops each year to strengthen their skills and expand their knowledge of the workplace. He gave as examples the auto-body instructor "who will go to Cleveland to take training" and two teachers in the secretarial program "who are going to Columbus for a week this summer to work in an insurance word-processing office."

When vocational educators in the six school districts were invited to predict what the next three years will bring to vocational counseling, their responses were animated and expansive.

The associate superintendent of the large-city school district and the supervisor of student services of the jointure in west-central Ohio both pointed to the need for improved and intensified services for what might be characterized as "youth at risk."

The supervisor of student services for the jointure in west-central Ohio reported that he is meeting monthly with his superintendent and other staff members to find ways to give more attention to what they call "the hard core student." He explained his school district's concern and effort in this manner:

> We have what we call a hard-core thirty. Some days, it's a hard-core sixty, . . . students who do not appreciate themselves, education, a family structure, discipline, another person's property or feelings. As a result, they get in the way of usual and normal education. They are a problem in the instructional process. . . . But we have a responsibility for them. . . .
>
> We are trying to identify those kids, spend more time with them, . . . and try to build some self-esteem, self-image, self-concept and find an area of work [where] they could enjoy some success. . . .

Several of the vocational educators interviewed indicated that vocational guidance programs will be placing greater emphasis on what the joint vocational school in west-central Ohio calls "job-seeking and job-keeping skills" during the next three years. These skills were described by the superintendent of that jointure in these terms:

> In many cases we are finding that you can get a job with the skills you learn here. You can't keep it unless you fit in and get along and have some kind of working relationship with the people that you work beside on a day-to-day basis. That also includes getting to work on time every day. Do the work required right the first time. Don't look at the clock. Stay until the work is done. Employers tell us they don't fire workers for not having the skill. They fire them for their inability to get along or get to work on time.

<u>If expectations of vocational education materialize, the next three years will see:</u>

-- Increased mechanization of school offices to provide for quicker retrieval of information about individual students.

-- Additional emphasis on health awareness; greater attention to job placement.

-- An expansion of in-service training for teachers and counselors, especially in regard to labor-market trends.

-- Greater specialization of counselors.

-- Intensified efforts to soften negative community attitudes toward vocational education.

-- Expanded follow-up activities with graduates of vocational programs.

The reader is advised that this list is intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

Common Program Features

The study identified five general characteristics that are common across the vocational counseling programs of all of the school districts involved in the study:

1. A commitment to improve vocational counseling services as well as the content of the vocational education program. This, the foremost commitment toward improvement, is more than talk; action plans are in various stages of implementation. An improvement goal being pursued by the six school districts is to maximize the time available to counselors for providing direct services to students and to improve the use of such time qualitatively.

All six school districts give evidence of respecting the local vocational-advisory council structure and are using it to point the way toward improvements in the vocational education program.

2. A heavy commitment to helping students and their parents make informed educational decisions. Vocational educators interviewed professed no interest in making decisions for students. The director of guidance for the large-city school district included in the study summed up the sentiments of all interview subjects in these words: "The final decision is always the student's or parent's."

3. A commitment to penetrating to the lower grade levels with information about the vocational education program. Vocational educators interviewed in this study see the tenth grade as much too late to initiate vocational counseling efforts. They do view the tenth grade as a critically important level for obvious reasons. The eighth grade is viewed as being of almost equal importance. The sixth grade is emerging as a third important grade level for vocational counseling purposes.

4. A close linkage between the vocational counseling program and the state-supported career education program.

5. The entire faculty in each of the six school districts is expected to provide counseling services. The program may have been institutionalized through the appointment of vocational guidance counselors, but teachers have not been relieved of responsibility for helping to meet the personal, vocational, and educational guidance needs of their students.

Unique Program Features

Although the six school districts included in this study share many common features in addition to those treated in the preceding section, their unique initiatives may be the most visible ingredient that stamps their vocational counseling programs as exemplary. Eighteen unique programs were identified in these school districts. Twelve focus on student services. Three relate to staff development. One each deals with administrative organization, the functioning of the advisory council, and internal communications.

Taken collectively, these initiatives mark the six school districts as dynamic and imaginative agencies, whose personnel are actively engaged in a continuous effort to discover better ways to serve students. A thumbnail sketch of one initiative from each school district is presented to illustrate the variety of their endeavors.

The joint vocational school in southern Ohio is not content with confining its orientation activities for the new class of juniors each year to the first day of school. It saves a major orientation activity for the fourth or fifth week of the new term, after the newcomers have developed a degree of familiarity with the school, its program, and the staff. This activity features the presentation of a slide film by the vocational guidance counselors in one of the academic classes of the juniors. The content of the presentation has been carefully developed to instill school pride in the students and inform them in depth about the responsibilities of key members of the professional staff. Services provided by vocational guidance counselors are emphasized.

While the orientation program just described is designed to help students get off to a good start in a vocational school, a unique activity at the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio helps seniors cap their schooling with concentrated attention on "job search and survival skills." The program, called the "Senior Job Clinic," features the heavy involvement of local industrial leaders.

According to the school's coordinator of guidance, the industrialists discuss the job-application process with students and give them "a real, live analysis of the job-search process." The industrialists describe techniques that are useful in locating a job, completing the application process, and preparing resumes.

The coordinator of guidance reported that his school prepares an original resume for each of the school's 475 seniors, free of charge, if they wish. The "Senior Job Clinic" also focuses on letters of application, interview techniques, and follow-up procedures. Practice interviews are videotaped, then critiqued "by professionals as well as peers."

In the large-city school district included in this study, counselors are among the professional personnel who are involved in a massive endeavor titled "Improving Services to Students Out of the Mainstream of the School System." The project has been in existence five years. Published material made available by the associate superintendent of the school district reveals the sheer magnitude of the project. It is unique in scope and depth. For example, the most recent annual report identified no fewer than forty-five project activities. They ranged all the way from providing specialized in-service training for teachers to involving forty-seven community agencies in the project, a most impressive effort to reach out for community assistance.

Although the "Students Out of the Mainstream" project is not aimed specifically at issues confronting vocational educators, its broad-gauged attack on problems associated with urban education is full of portent for the vocational program and deserves visibility in this report.

The supervisor of student services for the joint vocational school district in west-central Ohio described a unique approach to scheduling in-service activities for teachers, vocational guidance counselors, and administrators on "company time." The program features "mini" and "maxi" components. Dates for both kinds of in-service activities were scheduled at the beginning of the 1983-84 school year. "Mini" in-service activities were slated once a month and occupied a teacher for one class period. This is how the program worked, as described by the supervisor of student services:

On the day designated for a "mini" in-service activity, any teacher with a class first period goes to in-service instead of his or her class. A counselor and an administrator cover the class. Any teacher with a class during second period goes to in-service instead of his or her class, and so on through the day's schedule.

The coordinator explained that scheduling "mini" in-service sessions "on company time" is better than after school, when the "staff is blown out, tired, and ready to go home, or has papers to grade or tests to develop." The "maxi" in-service sessions feature a more traditional scheduling approach. They are held on days when students are not in school.

He said that teachers determine the in-service topics by means of a survey conducted at the beginning of the school year. As examples of topics selected, he cited time management, test development, job placement, and dealing with unruly students.

The director of career education for the city school district adjacent to one of Ohio's largest cities reported on a unique project titled "Teachers in the Workplace." She said the project resulted from her school district's desire "to bring teachers in touch with the world of work." At the heart of the project is one month of paid summer employment for teachers "in the non-school sector," accompanied by "associated academic work," according to the director of career education.

Business firms participating in the project are expected to provide meaningful tasks and assignments for the teachers to perform and to acquaint the teachers with the full scope of their business operations.[5] The project is designed to attain a multiplier effect when the teachers return to their schools in the fall. Not only are they required to provide instructional activities based on their summer experience, but they also are expected to conduct in-service sessions for their faculty colleagues.[6]

The director of the joint vocational school in north-central Ohio pointed to the scheduling of his school's advisory committee meetings during the regular hours of the school day as a unique development. He said this was done to make it possible for members of the committee to "talk to students [and] see what's happening." The school itself had a good "experience" following the first advisory committee during the 1983-84 school year. According to the director, "We probably brought in over one-million dollars in donations for the school." What did the donors contribute? Ten-thousand pounds of aluminum, steel, cars, air conditioning units, professional magazines, etc. A unique "experience" in the life of any vocational educator, one might say!

Program Evaluation and Development

Interview subjects in this study identified three primary sources of evaluation data that serve as the basis for many program-development activities: (1) the PRIDE evaluation process, which is conducted at five-year intervals; (2) annual program evaluations; and (3) local vocational advisory committees.

As stated in a report published by OACVE in 1983, PRIDE is "an inspired acronym using the initial letters of Program Review for Improvement, Development, and Expansion."[7] The report explains that PRIDE "is intended to satisfy three legal imperatives: the 'Minimum Standards for Ohio High Schools,' the official state plan for vocational education, and the mandates of the Vocational Act of 1963 and its subsequent amendments."[8] As such, the PRIDE process is a useful source of evaluative data for program-development purposes.

Annual evaluations customarily involve teachers and guidance counselors as well as administrators at the district level, the school level, and the program level, according to interview subjects.

The critical observations and recommendations of members of vocational advisory committee members add a dimension of reality to the store of evaluative data available to program planners and developers. In the aggregate, the evaluative data from all sources constitute a needs assessment, commonly the first step in the program-development process.

The kind of needs identified through current needs assessments include:

- Better communication between vocational schools and students, home schools, and parents.
- The organization of "support groups" to combat drug and alcohol problems.
- Additional staff to serve "hard core" youth.
- Additional staff to help students make a smoother transition from school to work.
- Additional clerical staff, possibly including the appointment of paraprofessionals.
- Additional community-based learning experiences for students.
- Expanded summer-work opportunities for students.
- Expanded and intensified in-service training programs for teachers and guidance counselors.
- A reduction in the pupil-counselor ratio.
- Greater accountability.
- Additional OCIS (Ohio Career Information System) terminals.

Staffing: Organization and Characteristics

It should come as no surprise that administrators of exemplary vocational counseling programs attribute institutional strength and success to the quality of staff personnel serving students. No one said it more succinctly than the associate superintendent of the large-city school district included in this study. "People make the primary difference. Everything else is far behind," he said.

What kind of qualities do these administrators look for in a counselor? In addition to the attributes that come to mind quickly, the superintendent of the jointure in west-central Ohio said his district prefers "counselors who are master teachers" so that "they understand the educational process." The coordinator of guidance for the joint vocational school district in north-central Ohio offered this advice: "When you're building a counseling program . . . you look for people . . . who have expertise in certain areas so that when they work [with their colleagues], they complement each other." The importance of assembling a counseling staff with complementary skills was recommended also by several other interview subjects.

Each of the six school districts was asked to provide information about the number of personnel assigned to the vocational counseling program and the pupil-counselor ratio. The responses, listed in the ascending order of pupil-counselor ratios, were as follows:

Suburban city school district in central Ohio -- 230-1; nine counselors assigned to the senior high school, including one responsible for career and placement counseling on a full-time basis. (This district has no vocational guidance counselors per se.) The director of career education said, "Vocational counseling in [our school] is broadly viewed in the context of what we do with a career-education emphasis. We view vocational counseling as the responsibility of a large number of the members of the school staff."

Joint vocational school district in southern Ohio -- 250-1; three counselors, two of whom are full time vocational guidance counselors. (The other counselor devotes about ten percent of his time to job placement and ten percent to attendance functions.)

Jointure in west-central Ohio -- 250-1; six personnel assigned to the student services office, including four vocational guidance counselors, one placement coordinator, and one nurse.

Jointure in north-central Ohio -- 282-1; five vocational guidance counselors, including one coordinator-supervisor.

Suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio -- 325-1; two vocational guidance counselors serving on a full-time basis and one serving on a one-third time basis.

Large-city school district -- 400-1; fifty-seven full-time counselors, none of whom is a vocational guidance counselor in the accepted sense of the term. The associate superintendent noted that his counselors are "generalists." He added, "At one time we had . . . vocational counselors, . . . but the [state] funding was so weak that we could no longer afford to supplement them."

All six of the school districts stressed the importance of involving classroom teachers, including those who teach academic subjects as well as those who teach vocational subjects, in the counseling program. The four joint vocational school districts also emphasized the critical contribution made by counselors at the home schools of the vocational students.

Interview subjects were asked to estimate how much of the student body's total counseling needs were met by various kinds of professional personnel. The response of the coordinator of guidance at the suburban jointure provides a perspective. He estimated that sixty percent of the need was met by vocational guidance counselors at the vocational school; twenty percent by home school counselors; and ten percent each by vocational teachers and academic teachers. While other joint-vocational-school respondents couched their estimates in more general terms, all agreed that the bulk of the counseling service was provided by vocational guidance counselors, with vital assistance and reinforcement being provided by home school counselors and teachers. The director of career guidance for the suburban city school district in central Ohio offered this perspective: "Our regular teachers do a great deal of career guidance through the infusion of career education into their on-going curriculum."

Interview subjects also were asked to estimate how vocational guidance counselors allocate their time among the nine dimensions of guidance.[9] The most precise estimates were made by the coordinator of guidance for the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio, who estimated that a total of eighty percent of their time was devoted to three dimensions:

1. Counseling service, 35%
2. Information service, 25%
3. Placement service, 20%.

The other twenty percent was distributed over six dimensions, as follows:

4. Evaluation and planning service, 5%
5. Pupil appraisal and record service, 4%
6. Parent conference service, 4%
7. Consultative service, 3%
8. Group guidance service, 2%
9. Resource coordination service, 2%.

Interview subjects spoke of the teamwork required to provide effective vocational counseling services in their respective school districts to the point of redundancy. The need for teamwork between and among administrators, counselors, and teachers at the vocational school and the feeder schools in a jointure was implicit in recommendations adopted by OACVE four years ago.[10]

The remarks of the supervisor of student services at the jointure in west-central Ohio are indicative of the current regard vocational educators have for teamwork. He said:

> I see our student services personnel being a team. The thing we all have in common is that we like kids, we like success. We're the kind of folks who believe that we can make a difference . . . collectively through our own expertise. . . . When we feel that we are at the end of our rope, we are willing to ask other persons for help to make a difference in some young person's life, whether it be adjusting and surviving in school, finding and seeking employment, getting that first job, making a decision to go into military service, or whatever.

Where does teamwork begin? The principal of the joint vocational school in north-central Ohio had a ready response. "It starts with the superintendents," he said. "To develop teamwork between the vocational school and the home school, . . . three levels [are involved]: superintendents, principals, and counselors," he added.

Building and maintaining good relationships with personnel assigned to feeder schools pays off, according to the coordinator of guidance for the suburban jointure.

The coordinator said:

> We enjoy one of the best relationships with . . . home-school personnel that my experience has shown. Home-school counselors have extended themselves to consider the growth and development of the student and have been willing to encourage the student to enroll in a vocational training program. These relationships have taken years to establish. Without their cooperation and support, the upcoming years of declining enrollment can be very treacherous for us.

A vocational counseling program that fails to capitalize on the resources of youth-service agencies in the community is shortsighted, according to several interview subjects. They speak of the need for vocational educators to identify such agencies, maintain an up-to-date roster of agency personnel, and form networks that can be utilized when a student presents problems or needs that cannot be fully accommodated by the school. "Outreach" was a favorite term of these interview subjects.

Before leaving the staffing area, interview subjects were asked to describe how their counseling services were organized. As might be suspected, no common pattern emerged, but two of the organizational arrangements merit brief attention in this report.

In the joint vocational school district in north-central Ohio, each vocational guidance counselor is assigned to two, three, or four of the home schools. The counselor "stays with" students from the home school all the way from recruitment to graduation. This organizational arrangement may be characterized as "student centered."

The suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio employs a "core-team concept" in organizing its vocational counseling program. Each counselor is assigned to a "core" of vocational programs. The teachers assigned to these programs, the supervisor, and the vocational guidance counselor constitute the "core" staff. This organizational arrangement may be characterized as "instruction centered."

A term coined by the supervisor of student services at the jointure in west-central Ohio provides a fitting cap to this treatment of the staffing characteristics of exemplary vocational counseling programs. The supervisor pointed to "people power" as the most outstanding characteristic of his school district. It seems apparent that "people power" is the hallmark of exemplary vocational counseling programs.

Supportive Structure

State reimbursement for vocational counseling units was the most tangible "supportive service" that came to mind when vocational educators were interviewed in this study. Actually, it would be more accurate to say the insufficiency of such reimbursement. This matter emerged as the major concern of respondents in five of the six school districts included in the study. The sixth district -- a suburban city school district -- doesn't have any vocational guidance counselors, which undoubtedly explains its lack of a stated concern in this area.

The other district that currently employs no vocational guidance counselors -- a large-city district -- abolished this position category about four years ago due to the inadequate level of state reimbursement, according to the associate superintendent interviewed. He characterized the state's reimbursement level as "like nothing."

Some of the interview subjects in the four joint vocational school districts were nearly as harsh in their assessments. The superintendent of the jointure in west-central Ohio termed the situation "intolerable."

The supervisor of student services for the same school district observed that personnel in other categories are reimbursed at the 50-to-75 percent level and added, "Guidance counselors are the most expensive of the extra-school-service personnel. . . . The reimbursement [for them] is so inadequate that schools are reluctant to have the kind of guidance services they really need."

The director of the joint vocational school in north-central Ohio pegged "funding" as his "main concern." He said:

> Ten years ago they (meaning the state) begged you to hire counselors and gave you 100 percent funding. . . . They said this was important, but after you get them, they take the money away. I think this is a crime because I think [vocational guidance counselors] are just as important as a vocational instructor.

The superintendent of the jointure in southern Ohio characterized his district's state reimbursement as "poor." He added, "It's a token amount, really." He pointed to two areas where state reimbursement is low, adult education and counseling, and commented, "Those two areas are very important, especially in an area such as ours."

The interview subjects had nothing but praise for the physical facilities available to vocational guidance counselors. The investigator observed that counseling suites are inviting and appealing. Most occupy convenient locations and are easily accessible.

The library of vocational counseling materials was judged by interview subjects to be adequate and up to date. The director of career education for the suburban city school district said, "We take a lot of pride in keeping [materials] as up to date as possible." In the same vein, the coordinator of guidance for the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio reported, "Literature and books are the most current available. Our audio-visual materials are exceptional."

A question about the extent to which each school district makes use of the Ohio Career Information Service (OCIS) drew a variety of expressions. The range of responses is illustrated by this comment of the director of career education for the suburban city school district in central Ohio: "We make very good use of OCIS" and this comment of the superintendent of the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio: "We have had an OCIS terminal in the past, but we gave it up several years ago."

The director of career education went on to say:

> We feel that since the State Department assumed responsibility for OCIS, the quality of the information and the efficiency of the services delivered both improved dramatically. It is far more cost-efficient for us [now]. OCIS is a very popular tool for our students and counselors, and something that receives considerable use.

The director of the joint vocational school in north-central Ohio was enthusiastic about OCIS. He said, "We've had it from day one. We use it for high school and adult education. It has been updated. It is excellent now. This is a key in our vocational counseling [program]."

The responses of three other interview subjects were somewhat more guarded. The superintendent of the jointure in southern Ohio said: "We really haven't used OCIS the way it should be used. We have had it only one year. . . . We are trying to develop an interest in OCIS. . . ." The associate superintendent of the large-city school district reported that OCIS "has been effectively used only by college-bound students." The superintendent of the jointure in west-central Ohio said his district hopes to install OCIS next year (1984-85).

Four of the school districts reported having a computerized vocational guidance system instead of, or in addition to, OCIS. The popularity of a computerized system was documented last year in a nationwide survey in which "high school counselors ranked it [as] their most desirable career information resource."[11]

Interview subjects also were asked to comment on the extent to which their school districts make use of the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services (OBES) for vocational counseling purposes. Again, a range of responses were recorded.

The director of the joint vocational school district in north-central Ohio said, "We have a good working relationship with OBES." He reported that an OBES staff member formerly had been stationed at the school "and helped us in placement." He said that school officials were renegotiating for such an arrangement again. A similar commentary was provided by the coordinator of guidance at the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio. The coordinator said their staff "does make extensive use of the Bureau's labor-market information and the appropriate labor-force monthly estimates."

Contact between the joint vocational school district in west-central Ohio and OBES is maintained through the representation of both agencies on "personnel management councils" in the school district, according to the superintendent of the jointure.

The coordinator of career education for the suburban school district in central Ohio said, "We do not refer many students to the OBES office because we [have our own placement service] and because the majority of our students are not [planning] . . . to go into employment immediately."

The superintendent of the jointure in southern Ohio reported that his school had "some contact" with OBES, but not much use had been made of OBES services this year "because there haven't been too many jobs" in his economically depressed part of the state. He said he thought "a lot more could be done" with OBES. "I think we could work with them on assessment of people."

The associate superintendent of the large-city school district tended to be critical of OBES school services. He said, "Over the years my experience has been that they do very little. . . . I don't see them as a part of any systematic networking."

Recruitment and Job-Placement

For the purposes of this study, two service areas were given concentrated attention: recruitment and job-placement. Many other student services were described by interview subjects, and several are included at appropriate places in this report.

The foundation for the recruitment effort is laid, almost unconsciously, in the career education program that reaches into the elementary grades. At least two of the six school districts included in this study give added attention to sixth graders, all six give considerable attention to eighth graders, and the effort is pursued with intensity at the tenth-grade level. Nowhere is this acceleration of attention exemplified better than in the suburban joint vocational school district in northeastern Ohio, where vocational counselors play a major role in the recruitment of students.

According to the district's coordinator of guidance, a "table-top demonstration project" has been developed to reach sixth graders in each of the eight home school districts. The project is coordinated through the vocational school's career education department.

The demonstrations are presented to small groups of sixth graders -- usually five to ten pupils are in each group -- by students enrolled at the vocational school. They demonstrate how tools and materials are used in the programs they are taking. The sixth graders are required to record their impressions of the demonstration and are given an opportunity to ask questions about careers in the field that was demonstrated.

Two years ago, this vocational school developed a "hands-on orientation program" for all eighth graders in the eight home districts. This program features visits to the vocational school by the eighth graders. They spend from one and one-half to three hours observing vocational instruction in action and gain hands-on experience in the labs. Each of the eighth graders is given an opportunity to work on his or her own mini-project "and take home the results," according to the coordinator of guidance. He added, "Most of the activity in each of the labs is supervised by the top two or three students, who also gain leadership skills" from the experience. The guidance coordinator estimates that more than 1,200 eighth graders have participated in this activity during the past two years.

The "table-top demonstration project" for sixth graders and the "hands-on orientation program" for eighth graders are designed to produce results when the active recruitment of tenth graders is conducted.

The tenth grade recruitment process of the joint vocational school district in north-central Ohio appears to be typical of the well-organized and well-executed programs employed at this grade level. All of the vocational guidance counselors at the school are actively involved in the process. Here's a synopsis of the program, as described by the school's director:

> We start in the fall with presentations to sophomores throughout the [district]. Counselors go to the buildings they're assigned to work with and make . . . presentations covering all of our programs. They use a slide presentation, pass out information sheets [describing] our programs, and answer general questions about the process for applying to the joint vocational school, continuing in extracurricular activities at their home school, et cetera. At that time, the student selects two or three programs of interest.
>
> Our counselors return in November or December and work with smaller groups that are interested in program-cluster groups so they can get a little more specific about individual programs.
>
> Following the cluster meetings, we invite all of the sophomores . . . who feel they may be interested in program areas to come out and tour our programs. We established two days this year for this purpose.
>
> Following that, they return to their home school and work with their home school counselor in preparing an application for the joint vocational school. When the application process is nearing completion, our counselors go back . . . to talk to those kids who have additional questions.

The director added that parents of prospective enrollees are invited to visit the school on a Sunday in February. This has proved to be a popular activity. It attracts from three- to five-thousand people, the director reported.

Two of the jointures reported that they have experienced problems with feeder schools in the recruitment process. The director of the jointure in north-central Ohio said it this way: "Some junior highs are more cooperative than others. Some of this is a reaction to restrictions their school district may have in terms of their ability to transport students."

A vocational guidance counselor at the jointure in southern Ohio had this to say:

> We invite and encourage all sophomores to come to the vocational school each fall for a tour. Some schools are very cooperative; others screen their sophomores very carefully. They only permit those that they want to hear about vocational education to come. . . . Each year it gets worse.

The counselor and the director of student services at the vocational school estimate that about two-thirds of the feeder schools "screen" the students they allow to visit the vocational school.

Two of the school districts included in this study -- the large-city system and the jointure in west-central Ohio -- are troubled by the term recruitment. The associate superintendent of the large-city district said, "I don't like the word 'recruitment'. I think it drives in the wrong direction psychologically."

The superintendent of the jointure said his district uses the term "orientation" instead of recruitment. He went on to say:

> The kids select us. We do not select them. It is an informed decision based upon a comprehensive career education program and close coordination between our student services faculty and the home school guidance counselors. . . .
>
> We do not have a quota system, so we take the students that desire to come here. If that means one [home] school has one enrollee in a program and another school has four enrollees, so be it. We're working to meet student interest as opposed to some arbitrary division of openings based upon ADM (Average Daily Membership) or something of that sort.
>
> We don't talk about admission. We talk about enrollment. Those two basic tenets, [which are] contained within board policy, have proved to be workable, and I don't know that you can improve upon board policy that speaks to meeting the needs of kids.

The school districts included in this study exemplify two different approaches to the job-placement process. In three of the districts, a placement specialist has relatively greater responsibility for the process than vocational teachers. In two of the districts, the opposite is true. (The sixth district did not provide information on this subject.)

At the suburban joint vocational school district in northeastern Ohio, the placement process begins in January with the "Senior Job Clinic" described previously in this report. In a related move, the job-placement specialist visits employers in the area, briefs them on the twenty-four vocational programs offered by the school, and "summarizes the opportunities available to them" if they employ any of the graduating seniors, the coordinator of guidance reported.

At the jointure in southern Ohio, a vocational guidance counselor handles job placements on a part-time basis. The process begins with a mailing of newsletters to potential employers in the area. The superintendent of this school district identified three productive sources of jobs for graduating seniors. One is the "approximately sixty businessmen" who are brought to the school each year to participate actively in the job-seeking component of the school's English program. This nine-week component features the preparation of resumes, the completion of application forms, and practice in interviewing for a job. The businessmen conduct the interviews.

The second source is the school's vocational advisory committee, which consists of 165 local people. The third source is staff membership and participation in local service clubs, such as Rotary and Kiwanis. Job opportunities are identified throughout the year as staff members attend the weekly meetings of these organizations.

At the suburban city school district in central Ohio, the placement process is the responsibility of the "career and placement counselor," who provides students with unpaid as well as paid opportunities.

At the jointure in north-central Ohio, vocational guidance counselors "set up guidelines for placement, but we . . . put the responsibility for placement with the teacher," the director of the school reported.

The school has an early-placement program for students who maintain good grades and good attitudes. Such students are eligible for placement during the second semester of their senior year. Those who are placed "get credit for work experience rather than lab grades," the director reported.

The school has developed a "central place" to register and process job opportunities as they become available. "When a call comes in for a job, it goes to one place. It's up to the counselor to get the information, find out what [the employer] wants, and get the teacher to follow up on it," the director explained.

As part of the overall placement process, the school makes an extensive mailing in January, alerting employers that seniors will be available for placement. The mailing also describes how the early-placement program works.

The large-city school district is the other district in this study to report that primary responsibility for job placement is placed with vocational teachers. Students in this district also benefit from a privately funded project called "Jobs for Graduates."

Regarding job placement, it is pertinent to report that the director of the joint vocational school district in north-central Ohio believes that "the standards of evaluation for placement are outdated." He explained his position in this manner:

> I think the main objective of vocational education is jobs. . . . There are transferable skills that we are not given credit for. I get upset when I look at the percent that go into related occupations.
>
> About fifty percent of our electronics students will go to a community college for electrical engineering. They decided while they were here that they didn't want to go into it at the minimal entry level. . . . There's nothing wrong with that.
>
> I was in vocational agriculture, so I'm a failure! I'm not a farmer.

Internal Communications

Generally speaking, would-be communicators have three media available to them: (1) the written word, (2) the spoken word, and (3) face-to-face relationships. This study established conclusively that vocational educators in each of the six school districts having exemplary vocational counseling programs make extensive use of all three media.

Thirty-six publications were collected during on-site visits to the six districts for later review and analysis. In general, these printed materials appear to be of acceptable quality. Most give evidence of being sensitive to the interests and needs of the reader. They are appealing to the eye. They make judicious use of photos, clip art, and original drawings to capture attention. They employ common type faces to convey the content. And the content itself communicates in an easy-to-understand fashion.

Vocational educators use the spoken word to communicate in assemblies and large-group situations. They employ slide presentations, films, and filmstrips to appeal to the eye as well as the ear.

To facilitate feedback, involvement, and two-way communication, vocational educators make extensive use of the face-to-face medium through an ambitious schedule of meetings. For example, in the suburban city school district in central Ohio, district-wide meetings for the guidance staff are scheduled three times a year, the guidance staff has monthly meetings by level (elementary, middle school, high school), and the seventeen-member career education staff meets twice a month.

At the joint vocational school district in west-central Ohio, a district-wide guidance meeting is scheduled monthly. It involves superintendents, principals, and counselors.

The superintendent of the jointure in southern Ohio encourages his vocational guidance counselors to make frequent visits to feeder schools as a means of improving communications across the district. He believes that such visits strengthen district-wide networks and the level of cooperation between home school counselors and the vocational guidance counselors at his school.

Despite the vigorous communication efforts being made, vocational educators see a need for further improvement.

External Relations

One of the most basic challenges facing vocational educators is to maintain up-to-date information on the labor market at the local, state, and national levels. Because the tasks associated with this challenge clearly lie beyond the resources of the individual school district, vocational educators find it necessary to establish effective working relationships with various agencies that attempt to keep up with labor-market trends.

School districts included in this study are responding to this challenge in a variety of ways. The superintendent of the joint vocational school district in southern Ohio said:

> We work with the PREP people (A local group). . . . We are very closely associated with JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act organization) and what's going on in the local PIC (Private Industry Council).

Information about the local labor market in this school district also is provided by employers as the school's placement coordinator and vocational teachers attempt to place students in jobs. Information on the state labor market comes through the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services. Another source used by this jointure is LEAP (Local Educational Administration Program). The superintendent explained that the State Department "puts out, through LEAP, a printout showing growth areas of employment in our state and also across the nation." The school district also works with JTPA "to keep on top of labor market information across the nation." He said: "JTPA has what they call a Job Club, which has telephone access to job-hunting to any city in the United States, and local newspapers from cities across the country. They also can provide funds for assistance in getting people to the jobs."

The job coordinator and other school personnel at the jointure in west-central Ohio secure labor-market data on a weekly and monthly basis through meetings with personnel managers and visits to industrial firms, the district's superintendent reported.

A different approach is taken by the suburban city school district in central Ohio. The director of career education for this district said:

> In recent years, we have devoted quite a bit of energy to keeping tab on . . . not only the current labor market, but the way the labor market is likely to evolve in later years when our students will become involved in the work force. Our information is about as current as it can be. We try to subscribe to . . . every [relevant] newsletter and magazine. We extract the [critical] information for our students and duplicate this for the teaching staff in a monthly publication. [It's] called "Looking Ahead."

The director of the joint vocational school in north-central Ohio said, "We're going to have to start developing our own labor-market data for the county. Current information is not that valuable to us." School personnel will work with two local chambers of commerce to develop the data.

In the large-city school district, "local and national labor-market information comes off our OCIS system," the director of guidance reported.

Members of vocational advisory committees also drew comments during the discussion of external relations. The superintendent of the jointure in west-central Ohio described them as "the heart and soul" of his district's program. A similar comment was made by the associate superintendent of the large-city district.

Interview subjects also were asked how knowledgeable vocational guidance counselors are about the world of work. The coordinator of guidance for the suburban jointure in northeastern Ohio noted that his job placement specialist had spent ten years recently in employment "in a number of business and industrial positions." He termed that experience as "valuable" to the school's vocational counseling program.

The superintendent of the joint vocational school district in west-central Ohio observed that vocational counselors are relatively better informed about the workaday world than home-school teachers and home-school counselors. He explained that they observe thirty programs of work in industry in the placement process, and as a result, do not lead sequestered lives.

The associate superintendent of the large-city district views lack of work experience in the private sector as a "limitation" counselors have. He feels that in-service activities could be helpful. Other possible approaches are the "Teacher in the Workplace" project and the short-term return of teachers to business and industry, both of which were described previously in this report.

Two of the school districts reported using recent alumni in an effort to keep students and faculty members abreast of the realities of the world of work.

Facilitants

This section has two parts.

The first part reports on the chief factors identified by interview subjects as contributors to the strength of vocational counseling services in the six school districts.

The second part consists of observations that the investigator wishes to make on this topic; it is summary in nature.

Most of the interview subjects singled out the quality of counselors as the chief factor facilitating the vocational guidance program. "We have a good corps of quality people," said the associate superintendent of the large-city school district. He also made reference to their "good professional attitudes."

The director of career education for the suburban city school district said, "We have a strong set of personnel who work in this area." She also observed that they "are well grounded" in their responsibilities.

The superintendent of the joint vocational school district in southern Ohio characterized his vocational guidance counselors as "the right people to do the job."

A related remark was made by the director of the jointure in north-central Ohio who cited the importance of having a staff with a variety of strengths "so they complement each other."

The "program's structure" was identified as a facilitant by one respondent, and "the flexibility that the administration allows in terms of program planning and implementation" was mentioned by another.

Finally, one superintendent identified the excellent physical plant in which the program is housed as a prominent facilitant.

The investigator concurs in all of the expressions of interview subjects reported above. Site visits, several reviews of the recorded interviews, and an examination of more than forty documents supplied by the interview subjects prompt the investigator to identify additional actual or potential facilitants, as follows:

- The support and leadership of personnel in the Divisions of Vocational Education and Educational Services at the Ohio Department of Education.
- The new State Minimum Standards.
- The report of the Ohio Commission on Educational Excellence.
- Vocational advisory committees.
- Career education programs that reach into the elementary grades.
- Teamwork among all vocational educators and teachers of academic courses.
- An abundance of informative and attractive publications that interpret vocational program offerings and vocational counseling services to students.
- Adequate library of vocational counseling materials in vocational guidance offices.
- Computerized vocational counseling information easily accessible to guidance counselors.
- A carefully conceived student-recruitment plan that concentrates activities at the sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade levels.
- A job-placement program that features the teaming of vocational educators.
- Regular meetings of vocational educators, home-school counselors, and teachers of academic courses at appropriate intervals.
- PRIDE evaluation reports.
- Annual program evaluations.
- Program-development and staff-development based on program-evaluation data.
- Networking with community-based youth-service agencies.

Constraints

This section employs the same format as the preceding section. That is, the views of interview subjects regarding the factors that prevent vocational counseling programs from being stronger are presented first and are followed by the observations of the investigator.

Vocational educators interviewed in this study identified the low level of state reimbursement for vocational guidance counselors as the leading constraint on vocational counseling programs. Since this matter has been dealt with in detail previously in this report, it needs no elaboration at this point. It should be noted, however, that one of the interview subjects felt that the problem wasn't a lack of resources so much as how the resources are being committed and used.

Only a few other constraints were mentioned by respondents. Three bear a relationship to each other. The first, which relates to community attitudes, drew this comment from an interview subject: "I really believe our major obstacle lies in people not being able to fully comprehend what [counselors] are trying to accomplish." Later she said:

> We face an even greater obstacle in community attitudes toward vocational education. Many parents feel that vocational paths have less significance and less value than professional and college-bound paths. We do everything in our power to help them understand, . . . but it still is very difficult to break through some of the previously-set attitudes that exist.

The second related observation was made by a superintendent who senses that vocational guidance counselors have a credibility problem. He explained it this way:

> I believe that for many years counselor educators tried to keep counseling services secret. They called it privileged information. . . . Counselors by their very nature have been reluctant to stand up and take credit for scholarship dollars that they have found for a student. It's kind of hard to tell the world that you helped to pull a kid up by his bootstraps because of his own attitude [or] lack of self-concept, and you can't tell that story without embarrassing the student you helped.

The third related observation was stated bluntly. "Counseling to the public is a dirty word," said the director of a joint vocational school. His antidote for the problem was stated just as directly. "We have to update our terminology," he said. That's why

his school has a "student services department," not a "counseling department." His final comment on this subject was, "As educators, we must keep up with the terminology that is acceptable to business and industry."

Two other, unrelated constraints were mentioned by interview subjects. One superintendent identified the assignment of non-counseling duties to vocational guidance counselors as a constraint. He said, "I suppose if we narrowed the scope of what they do by taking away some of the extra duties, they could be more effective."

The last constraint identified was the quality of communications between vocational guidance counselors and school administrators and between the counselors and vocational teachers. It was cited by the principal of a joint vocational school who blamed the condition on the complexity of vocational school operations, the variety of problems a counselor must deal with, and unanticipated interruptions in the schedules of administrators, counselors, and vocational teachers. As such, it is a difficult problem to cope with successfully.

In addition to the expressions of interview subjects, the investigator wishes to offer this list of constraints:

- The shortage of jobs available to Ohio's youth, caused in part by the lag in economic recovery in the state.
- Incomplete information about labor-market trends at the local, state, and national levels.
- Lack of current information about the world of work on the part of some vocational educators.
- Excessive pupil-counselor ratios in some school districts.
- Insufficient staff to provide the kind of program and services needed by drop-out prone youth.
- Absence of a written communications plan in most school districts.

Problems

Exemplary vocational counseling programs are not without problems. The problems resulting from low-level state reimbursement for vocational guidance counselors and various constraints afflicting vocational counseling programs have been covered in this report already. Now the focus shifts to problems associated with the decline in teen-age population, the trend toward more demanding graduation requirements, the specification of academic coursework required for unconditional admission to state universities in Ohio, and the apparent reluctance of some home schools to cooperate in facilitating the enrollment of students in vocational education programs.

The declining youth population drew comments from vocational educators in five of the six school districts included in this study. A director of guidance said there simply are "not enough students to go around." By that, he meant to fill classrooms in the home schools and the vocational schools.

The director of a joint vocational school indicated that one of the issues that emerges when enrollment decreases is "protection of jobs." A director of career education identified another problem. She said declining enrollment "certainly affects the variety that we can offer in our program. As our population decreases, it means an ever-greater struggle to achieve adequate enrollment in many different areas."

The move toward more demanding high school graduation requirements could bring vocational education to "the brink of disaster," the Columbus Dispatch reported on April 29, 1984. The newspaper attributed the remark to Jack R. Frymier, a professor of education at The Ohio State University. The story quoted Dr. Frymier as saying that the requirements "are going to . . . squeeze kids out of vocational education. And it will be tragic for the kids, the state and the country if kids are forced into programs they don't want and don't like."[12]

Vocational educators interviewed in this study have felt the initial impact of the new requirements. The director of guidance for the large-city school district reported that his school system is "now at 19½ Carnegie units." He added, "It's pressing us." A director of student services indicated that one of the feeder schools in his joint

vocational school district is moving to a requirement of twenty units for graduation. In his opinion, we may be "creating a tracking system going clear back into the eighth grade again with the requirements we're setting up."

Vocational educators saw additional implications in the new requirements. The large-city administrator said, "As the academic requirements become more stringent, . . . there will be less time in the curriculum for students to take vocational programs." The superintendent of a joint vocational school district saw the possibility of changes being required in "the delivery system of vocational education" to make it "compatible with the increased emphasis on basic education and changing standards for high school graduation as well as college enrollment."

The director of student services at a joint vocational school district said, "Vocational schools are probably going to have to get involved in teaching math and possibly some additional kinds of English."

The coordinator of guidance at another jointure indicated that the orientation visits of vocational guidance counselors to home schools to meet with sophomores "may now take on a different approach. . . . As for those students who will be definitely heading toward college, we will have to develop a vocational-academic program that will accommodate both, if possible."

The director of career education at the suburban city school district said that students who intend to pursue a vocational program, then go to college "almost have to enroll in summer school, at least one summer if not two, in order to complete all of the courses that are necessary for them to achieve both goals."

The specification of coursework required for unconditional admission to state universities could produce an impact on vocational education that is equal to, or greater than, the impact of stiffer graduation requirements, according to the vocational educators interviewed. The new specifications have their origin in the Report of the Advisory Commission on Articulation Between Secondary Education and Ohio Colleges,[13] which was released in April, 1981. Thirty months later, the Columbus Dispatch reported that nine of Ohio's twelve major state-assisted, four-year universities had taken action based on the report.[14]

Vocational students already are being affected by the new specifications. The director of student services at a joint vocational school said, "A number of students come in and say, 'I'm going back to my home school next year. . . . I'm going to Ohio State and I need to take more English. . . .'"

Brief treatment was given to the apparent reluctance of some feeder schools to cooperate with joint vocational schools in facilitating the enrollment of students in vocational programs previously in this report. In essence, programs appear to be competing for a shrinking pool of students, due to declining enrollment. The superintendent of a joint vocational school said the competitiveness "must be spoken to." His director of student services added this comment: "I don't know where the answer lies. . . . We're doing a disservice not only to the kids who might enter vocational school but also to the home school kids by competing for them in a way that's detrimental."

Both the superintendent and director acknowledge that declining enrollment creates problems for the home schools. But both also express a commitment to students' having an opportunity to pursue the educational program that is most appropriate for them.

Preferred Solutions

In suggesting solutions to the problems identified, vocational educators gave evidence anew of their healthy respect for the complexities inherent in the problems. Nobody had pat answers. Several expressed a preference for "working around" the problems rather than confronting them head-on.

With reference to the problem posed by low-level state reimbursement for vocational guidance counselors, several vocational educators suggested that the state give consideration to increasing the amount. The superintendent of a joint vocational school district offered another suggestion relating to funding; namely, that the funding of vocational education and "general education" be put on a more equitable basis as a means of reducing the competition for students between the two programs.

With reference to the problems caused by declining enrollment, the coordinator of guidance for a joint vocational school district reported that the board of education of his district had made several day-school vocational programs available to adults, an initiative that appears to be worthy of emulation.

With reference to problems created by the trend to more demanding graduation requirements and specified college-prep coursework for unconditional admission to state universities in Ohio, the associate superintendent of the large-city school district reported that his school system is moving from five-hour blocks of instructional time for vocational programs to three-hour blocks. The director of career guidance for the suburban city school district indicated that some adjustment in scheduling should be considered.

Finally, with reference to the problems created by the apparent reluctance of feeder schools to cooperate in the recruitment of students for vocational programs, the director of a joint vocational school suggested improving communications with parents and students and developing better relationships with feeder-school teachers. The director of student services for another jointure sounded the same note, saying, "We've seen an improvement in our being able to talk to younger students." He added, "Really, the key to whether the student comes here (to the joint vocational school) is the parent. . . . If the parent gets involved, the problem seems to diminish or go away." In confronting this problem, vocational educators are well advised to review the recommendations made by OACVE in a research report released in August, 1980.[15]

Observations And Conclusions

Evidence exists in abundance to suggest that the six school districts selected for this study, by virtue of their having exemplary vocational counseling programs, are institutions with a sense of mission. Their professional personnel are proud to be associated with them. The school administrators and guidance personnel interviewed in this study came through as being student-centered, service-oriented, goal-directed, and success-driven. These characteristics help explain the artifacts of excellence that are so visible in each of the districts.

But all is not perfect in these school districts. They have their share of problems. The problems are real. They are not imaginary. A major source of some of the problems is embedded in the mission of these school districts, which is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that will make them employable upon graduation. Jobs must be available if that mission is to be accomplished with dispatch. But jobs are not available in the number required. That is a problem for vocational educators, just as it is a problem for presidents, governors, and community boosters. It is not a problem that vocational educators have made for themselves. That makes no difference; it is a problem they must cope with as they plan and execute educational programs.

If your institutional mission is to prepare students for jobs and you, as an individual, are responsible for educational program planning, it helps to have up-to-date information about labor-market trends on hand. The same is true if you are a guidance counselor. But often such information is not readily available. Why it isn't is beside the point. You have an educational program to plan or a student to counsel, and you don't have the information you need. That is a problem. Again, it makes no difference that this is not a problem that vocational educators have made for themselves. They must make do with what they have as best they can. Often, they do quite well.

As a vocational educator, you find yourself involved in another problem: competition for students resulting from declining enrollment. The competition is between the vocational school and the home school. Money is at stake. Teaching jobs are on the line. The competition is serious business despite the best efforts of conscientious educators at the home school as well as the vocational school to see that the interests of students are accorded highest priority.

The competition-bred-by-declining-enrollment problem could intensify for vocational educators in the future as a result of two new developments: the adoption of more demanding graduation requirements and the move by nearly all of Ohio's public-supported universities to specify additional academic coursework as the basis for unconditional admission. It makes no difference that each of these developments is based on a persuasive rationale. In combination with declining enrollment, these new developments pose a frustrating problem for vocational educators. The frustration comes from seeing students "squeezed out" of vocational programs, to use Professor Frymier's term.

Two other problems that are common to all of education have special implications for vocational education. Reference is made to communications and the changing economy.

The communications process is fraught with difficulty for all educators because education is a people-intense enterprise. The speaker and the listener often are on different wave lengths, particularly if the subject under discussion has an emotional dimension. In vocational education, the transmission lines tend to be longer due to the geographic spread of the school district. Concomitantly, the population tends to be more diverse. And the subject matter being communicated tends to be more specialized. Given these conditions, vocational educators can hardly devote too much time and energy to efforts to improve communications.

In the wake of the transition from an industrial economy to an information society, old jobs are evaporating and new jobs are emerging. Familiar old stars have disappeared from the guidance counselor's universe, and new stars-to-steer-by are hard to find in the counselor's dynamic firmament. In simplest terms, the changing economy means that counselors must run faster just to stay in place.

In spite of these problems, the investigator who conducted this study would venture two speculations: (1) The six school districts involved in the study provided better programs and services for students during 1983-84 than the preceding year; and (2) They will provide even better programs and services during 1984-85. Why? Because a strong current of optimism is running in each of the districts in spite of the problems portrayed above. And there is ample evidence that the current of optimism has been converted into a commitment to change and innovation, two indispensable ingredients in educational improvement.

Recommendations

The following recomendations, based upon the findings of this study, are made for the consideration of the Ohio Department of Education, Boards of Education, School Administrators and other personnel and organizations interested in the improvement of vocational education.

1. Review the concerns of vocational educators regarding the state's role in the state-local partnership for funding vocational education with attention given to the level of state reimbursement for vocational guidance counselors.

2. Require each joint vocational school district to prepare and file with the State Department a written communications plan. Such a plan should identify the specific audiences with which the district must communicate, the major communication subjects, and the media to be employed with each audience on a regular basis. The plan should describe how the JVSD intends to communicate with prospective students, parents, home school principals, teachers, and counselors. It is further recommended that the State Department publication, "Communicating Guidance Services,"[16] be used as a reference guide in planning communications activities.

3. Make greater use of computerized guidance information services. Special consideration should be given to using the Ohio Career Information Service (OCIS) and the location of terminals for convenient access to guidance counselors.

4. Solicit a state-wide organization such as the Ohio School Boards Association or the Buckeye Association of School Administrators to take the lead in convening a conference on the impact of the move toward more demanding graduation requirements and the specification of college prep course work as the basis for unconditional admission to Ohio's public supported universities. Such an effort should embrace all forms of specialized education including vocational education and magnet programs in alternative schools.

5. Organize a consortium of Ohio foundations to fund the development of a "Central Clearinghouse" for up-to-date information on labor market trends for a selected vocational planning district to serve as a model that could be replicated.

6. Strengthen and expand the state supported career education program to effect closer relationships with vocational education.

7. Give consideration to the enactment of policies that encourage guidance counselors and teachers to gain greater awareness of business and industrial operations.

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